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CONTEMPO

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Ten Cents a Copy

I Will Not Weep for Youth

I will not weep for youth in after years
Nor will there haunt me, when I am old,
The world's face in its springtime, blurred with
tears
That healed to dust harsh pageantries of gold.

Nor will dulled brain, nor ears at a sound scarce
beard

Trouble old bones asleep from a sun to a sun
With a dream forgot, a scent or a senseless bird,
That now with earth and silence are brethren: one.

Poplar leaves swirl sunward, bright with rime,
To a stately minuet of wind in wheat;
And spring is blown on ruins of old time
Cruel, incurious, superbly sweet;

And swallows that arch and tighten across the
heart

Will strike no hidden chord, when it is mute:
A caught breath, flash of limbs in the myrtles
apart,
Dancing girls to a shrilling of lyre and lute.

Death and I'll amicably wrangle, face to face,
Mouthed dread crumbs of pain and ecstasies,
Regarding without alarm cold seas of space—
Eternity is simple where sunlight is.

Knew I Love Once

Knew I love once? Was it love or grief
This young body by where I had lain?
And my heart, this single stubborn leaf
That will not die, though root and branch be slain?
O mother Sleep, when one by one these years
Bell their bitter note, die away
Down Time's slow evening, passionless as tears
When sorrow long has ebbed, and grief is gray;
Though warm in dark between the breasts of
Death,

That other breast forgot where I did lie,
And from the stalk are stripped the leaves of
breath,

There's still one stubborn leaf that will not die
But restless in the wild and bitter earth,
Gains with each dawn a death, with dusk a birth.

Twilight

Beyond the hill the sun swam downward
And he was lapped in azure seas;
The dream that hurt him, the blood that whipped
him
Dustward, slowed and gave him ease.

Behind him day lay stark with labor
Of one who strives with earth for bread;
Before him sleep, tomorrow his circling
Sinister shadow round his head.

But now, with night, this was forgotten:
Phantoms of life round man spin fast;
Forgotten his father, Death, Derision
His mother, forgotten by her at last.

Nymph and faun in this dusk might riot
Beyond Time's cold greenish bar
To shrilling pipes, to cymbals' hissing
Beneath a single key star

Where he, to his own confusion
—A terrific figure on an urn—
Is caught between his two horizons,
Forgetting that he must return.

"Once Aboard the Luggar"

In the middle of the afternoon we made a
landfall. Ever since we left the mouth of the
river at dawn and felt the first lift of the sea,
Pete's face had been getting yellower and yel-
lower, until by midday and twenty four hours
out of New Orleans, when we spoke to him he'd
glare at us with his yellow cat's eyes, and curse
Joe. Joe was his older brother. He was about
thirty-five. He had some yellow diamonds big
as gravel. Pete was about nineteen, in a silk shirt
of gold and lavender stripes, and a stiff straw
hat, and all day long he squatted in the bows,
holding his hat and saying Jesus Christ to him-
self.

He wouldn't even drink any of the whiskey
he had hooked from Joe. Joe wouldn't let us
take any with us, and the Captain wouldn't have
let us fetch it aboard, if he had. The Captain
was a teetotaler. He had been in the outside
trade before Joe hired him, where they took on
cargoes of green alcohol in the West Indies and
had it all flavored and aged and bottled and la-
beled and cased before they raised Tortugas. He
said he never had been a drinking man, but if he
ever had, he'd be cured now. He was a real pro-
hibitionist: he believed that nobody should be al-
lowed to drink. He was a New Englander, with
a face like a worn doormat.

So Pete had to hook a couple of bottles from
Joe, and we brought them aboard inside our pants
leg and the nigger kid them in the galley, and
between wheel tricks I'd go forward where Pete
was squatting, holding his hat, and have a nip.
Now and then the nigger's disembodied face
ducked into the port, without any expression at
all, like a mask in carnival, and he passed up a
cup of coffee which Pete drank and like as not
threw the cup at the nigger's head just as it ducked
away.

"He done busted two of them," the nigger
told me. "We ain't got but four left, now. I
gonna give it to him in a bakin' powder can next
time."

Pete hadn't eaten any breakfast, and he flung
his dinner overside and turned his back while I
ate mine, his face getting yellower and yellower,
and when we fetched the island—a scar of sand
with surf creaming along its windward flank and
tufted with gnarled purple pines on a darkling
twilt sea—his face and his eyes were the same
color.

The Captain held inside. We passed into the
island's lee. The motion ceased and we ponded
along in slack water of the clearest green. To
starboard the island stretched on, heaped and
sombre, without sign of any life at all. Across
the Sound a low smudge of mainland lay like a
violet cloud. From beyond the island we could
hear the boom and hiss of surf, but inside here
the water was like a mill-pond, with sunlight
slanting into it in green corridors. And then Pete
got really sick, leaning overside and holding his
hat on.

Twilight came swiftly. The clear green of the
water, losing the sun, darkened. We beat on
across a pulseless surface fading slowly to the hue
of violet ink. Against the sky the tall pines stood
in shabby and gaunt parade. The smudge of
mainland had dissolved. Low on the water where
it had been, a beacon was like a cigarette coal.
Pete was still being sick.

(Continued on page four)

Visions in Spring

And at last, having followed a voice that cried
within him

Through veils of changing shadow, evening fell
Upon him as he stood, aghast. Around him
Spread widening circles of a bell.

And then another bell slid star-like down the
silence

Stagnant about him, and awoke
A sudden vagueness of pain. That—he said, and
trembled—

Was my heart, my ancient heart that broke;

My heart that I so carefully guarded, empty
Of plant and seed, the acts of day by day
That would have made of it a garden for age to
nod in,
Has broken and fallen away.

For I, who sought so much, I disregarded
The pennies one should hoard if one would buy
Peace, a corner for weary feet to stray to—
Above him, swiftly, slenderly,

The trees tossed silver arms in sleeves of green
And lustrous limbs and boughs
Moved in a hushed measure to an ancient music.
And then once more the brows

Of dancers he had dreamed before him floated,
Calm, unassuaged, in a sea of evening air;
Lips repeating the melody, sustaining the cooling
sunset

In the stummed stillness of their hair.

Lightly they rose about him, quickening in magic,
And his own life, so lax within his eyes,
Stirred again; this beauty touched him, quiet,
weary:

Soft hands of skies

Delicately swung the narrow moon above him
And shivered the tips of trees, until he heard
A kissing of leaves; then lo! the dream had van-
ished.

He raised his hand, and stirred

And would have cried aloud, but was dumb as
were the branches

That tightened to a faint refrain
Clinging like gossip about them, that softly
soured him.

Then the bells again

Like falling leaves, rose mirrored up from silence;
And he, in silence, with his empty heart

Pondered: I had this thing I sought, that now has
escaped me

When it was shattered apart.

For I, who toiled through corridors of harsh
laughter,

Who sought for light in dark reserves of pain,—
What shall I do, who am old and weary and
lonely,

Too weary to alone set forth again?

Softly above his head clear waves of darkness
Came up and filled the trees

And smoothed the rigid branches to restless coral.
He rose from stiffened knees.

Spring, blown white along the faint-starred dark-
ness,

Arose again about him, like a wall
Beneath which he stood and watched, growing
colder and colder,

A star immaculately fall.

